

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE **AI**NEW YORK TIMES
28 October 1985

U.S. Worries About Security Of 2 Big Bases in Philippines

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Special to The New York Times

SUBIC BAY, the Philippines — The scene seemed familiar: United States marines in battle gear with camouflage blacking on their faces, moving along a jungle trail and carrying M-16 rifles.

It was a routine patrol within the perimeter of this vast base, with no enemy and no war. But the symbolism did not escape the soldiers themselves.

"Charlie's out there somewhere," one of them joked, using the terminology of the Vietnam War.

With increasing anxiety in Washington about the stability of the Philippine Government, and plans under way to invest \$1.3 billion to upgrade America's two big bases here, the long-term security of the installations has become a growing issue.

Two recent intelligence studies for Congress have warned that the political and military situation in the Philippines is deteriorating, adding to concern about the future of the bases, Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base.

Reagan Sends an Envoy

Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard L. Armitage has said the Filipino insurgents could reach a "strategic stalemate" with the armed forces in three to five years.

As an indication of the Administration's concern about the situation in the Philippines, President Reagan sent a personal envoy, Senator Paul Laxalt, on an informal diplomatic mission here recently. Senator Laxalt met with President Ferdinand E. Marcos and later said he had agreed to permit American observers at the Philippine election in 1986 and 1987 and to relax his

controls over the Philippine military.

"We now have a base line from which future reforms can be assessed," said Mr. Laxalt, a Nevada Republican.

An agreement allowing the United States to use the two bases in the Philippines expires in 1991, and negotiations to renew the pact are expected to begin before then.

Effects of a Move

American officials say there are no plans to move the bases. But they have also been talking publicly about contingency plans for a move, which they say are a normal part of military analysis.

It is a move that Philippine opponents of President Marcos are increasingly demanding. Even Mr. Marcos's Government is finding it politically expedient these days to make disparaging remarks about the bases. But it is a move that would pose severe difficulties for the Americans.

Estimates of the cost of moving them, if the need arises, have ranged from \$2 billion to \$8 billion.

Analysts say it is probable that no one site could duplicate the complex of services the two bases provide, and therefore it is likely that some operations would be scattered among more than one location.

The alternative sites usually mentioned are the Pacific islands of Guam, where the United States now has a smaller base, and Tinian. Both are in the Marianas.

Largest Overseas Bases

Subic Bay Naval Base, which covers 450 square miles of land and ocean in one of the world's great natural harbors, and Clark Air Base, with a 150,000-acre target range that is unmatched in any other overseas installation, are the biggest American bases of their kind outside United States territory.

They are placed on air and sea routes to control and supply a broad sweep of Asia, from the American base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean through the vital Strait of Malacca into the South China Sea and the Pacific.

They guard what the military calls "choke points" for one-half of the oil supplies that travel from the Persian Gulf to Western markets.

Just 70 minutes by jet fighter from the huge Soviet base at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, the bases in the Philippines have grown in importance as the

Soviet naval presence in the Pacific has grown.

Difficult to Duplicate

No alternative site offers either strategic location or natural features that would come near to duplicating the advantages of the two bases, American officials say.

Relocation to Guam and Tinian, which lie more than 1,500 miles east of the Philippines, would move the key American centers three to four hours' flying time, or several days' sailing time, farther from the areas they defend.

It would also mean the loss of a skilled and inexpensive work force that could not be found on small Pacific islands.

The two bases employ 44,000 local workers, many of them experienced tradesmen whose families have worked in specialties such as ship repair for generations. That many workers would equal half the population of Guam and more than the total popula-

tion of Tinian.

The wages now paid are estimated to be about one-seventh of what Americans would receive if they replaced Filipinos. Some of the Filipinos, for example the Negrito tribesmen who build bamboo models of airplanes for Clark's target range, are paid in rice.

On the naval base, where an average of 9,000 sailors come ashore each day, a move seems far away.

The base bustles with activity, in its 200 acres of warehouses, along its runways and roads, and in some of the most lavish recreational sites the American military offers. There are auto hobby shops and sites for horseback riding and skeet shooting.

Western diplomats here suggest that with the attention that has now been aroused over the future of the bases, it would be politically difficult for the United States to draw back from plans to improve them.

U.S. Commitment Cited

Any move such as a public search for alternative sites, they say, would shake confidence in America's commitment to the bases and would further complicate its political difficulties.

These difficulties, which include recent suggestions by the Government that the Philippines could live well without the bases, may in part be preliminary maneuvering over the renewal of the bases agreement.

Under the current five-year contract, which was signed in 1963, the United States is required to pay \$900 million as

compensation for use of the bases, about half of it in military aid and half in economic assistance.

The Marcos Government is expected to demand a large increase in this sum under any new agreement.

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Plans for Improvements

The \$1.3 billion that the Pentagon has earmarked for improvements would go primarily into upgrading the physical plant, including the runways and housing. But Maj. Thomas J. Boyd, public affairs director for Clark Air Base, said security improvements would also be included.

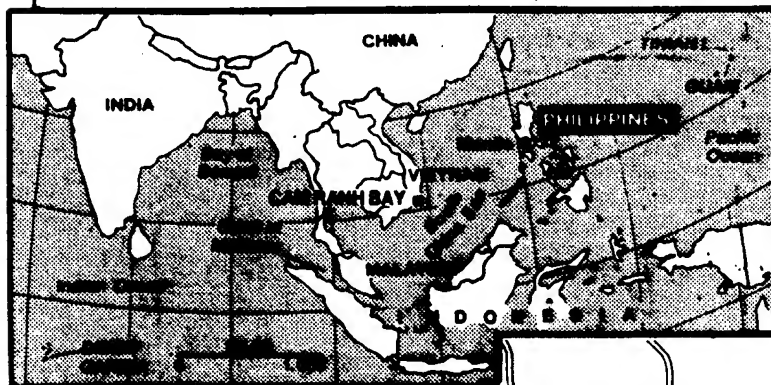
These improvements would presumably address serious breaches reported last month by a delegation from a Senate subcommittee. It found empty guard towers and missing fencing around much of the perimeter of Clark, which, like Subic Bay, is patrolled by the Philippine military.

Most dramatically, the subcommittee reported evidence of Communist guerrilla presence within the perimeter of the Subic installation, which includes miles of fields and hilly jungle that are used for gunnery practice and other training exercises.

The subcommittee report found the signs of guerrilla presence in these outer parts of the base "nothing short of incredible."

The potential for a clash between guerrilla groups and the American marines who tramp the jungle trails with their M-16 rifles, the report said, "is all too apparent."

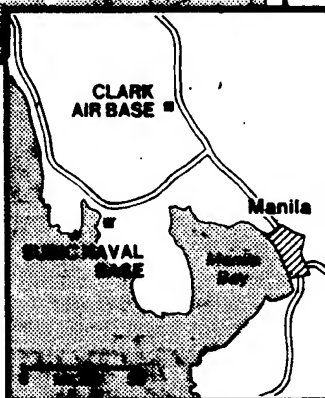
Military Strength Near the Philippines



Soviet Union

CAM RANH BAY

- Considered Moscow's largest overseas naval installation.
- 12 surface combatants and submarines, with about 7 support ships, in port on average day.
- Aircraft: Nearly 20 bombers and reconnaissance planes, in addition to air defense fighters.
- Shore-based maintenance, communications and intelligence facilities.



Source: Defense Department

United States

SUBIC NAVAL BASE

- Support operations center for Seventh Fleet, which includes 90 ships, 550 aircraft and 70,000 personnel in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- Includes naval station, naval supply depot, ship repair facility and a naval air station for patrol, logistical and other support aircraft.
- Small number of home-port ships.

CLARK AIR BASE

- Headquarters for 13th Air Force, which includes:
 1. 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing with 2 F-4 squadrons, 1 F-5 squadron and the 3rd Combat Support Group.
 2. Tactical fighter training group.
 3. Regional medical center.
 4. Information systems group, which provides computer services.
- Base for 374th Tactical Airlift Wing, comprising 5 airlift squadrons.